

Sermon: 2nd Sunday after Trinity

Text: Luke 14:15-24 (v. 16,17) Theme: God's gracious invitation

Goal: To advise people not to reject God's gracious invitation, but to accept with gladness what Jesus offers us through the church.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Our Fundraising events are usually well attended. But sometimes it happened that we had to cancel an event because very few people intended to come due to other appointments, presenting excuses and apologies for not coming. It's frustrating when it happens. - We will have a Fundraising Dinner on the last Saturday of July and I hope that the attendance will be good.

But when we are invited to dine at some friend's home, it must be a very strong reason not to accept the invitation. It's a pleasure for host and guest to enjoy a dinner together!

What about God's invitation to His banquet?

I – Luther on this text

Luther wrote about this parable: *Here the master of the house and banquet host is the heavenly Father, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth. He has prepared a truly great banquet, where the food and drink are different from that served in the temporal kingdom; but the guests, though bidden, spurn his invitation. Other guests are then pressed to attend, until his home and table are filled to capacity.*

Of this the Lord Christ is speaking in this parable of the great banquet. First of all, he extols the great, incomparable goodness and mercy of the heavenly Father, who has prepared a truly great, sumptuous banquet and summons us poor beggars on

earth to eat and to drink with him at his table in the kingdom of heaven. He then denounces and reproves the rude, atrocious callousness of those who spurn his graciousness and the sumptuous, delicious meal which would satisfy their hunger forever; but their attachment is to the earthly kingdom and in the process, they forfeit the kingdom of heaven. (Phil Brandt, pp 51,52).

God's invitation is to enjoy His gracious presence and love, a privilege conquered by Christ through His work of reconciliation on the cross. This fellowship with God is offered through the Gospel and the Sacrament – the very table of God! – and all who believe and accept God's invitation are blessed! But not all accept it...

I – The first guests

Jesus addressed this parable first to the Pharisees, the leaders of the Jewish church. The Jews were the very first to be invited to God's banquet. The whole Old Testament tells us the story of God coming to the aid of His people, again and again, calling them to have fellowship with Himself. But after a while, people ran away after their own appointments and greed, even after others false gods, despising God's invitation and God's fellowship, and going astray. To show His love and His intention to His people, God even sent His Son to live with His people and to invite them to be in fellowship with the Father. But they despised Him. Their reasons were stronger than God's reasons... They made excuses for not coming to the banquet and they rejected God's love; and a strong judgment is said upon them: "Not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

II – The second guests

But the feast was ready. The food cannot be wasted. The owner of the house wanted to share His gifts with all. So, He ordered

His servants: “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” Those people were considered outcasts by the Pharisees and despised. And we know from the Gospel how much attention and love Jesus gave to these outcast people. They were like sheep without a shepherd, and Jesus shepherded them. They were brought into the banquet hall, into God’s Kingdom by God’s grace. They were happy that they were invited and they accepted the invitation and came to Jesus, believing in Him.

III – The third guests

But even so, there was plenty of room at the banquet hall. The servants reported it to their Master, and he told them: “Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.” Who are those? They are those who were far out the town. Luther said that they are the Gentiles, those who didn’t belong to God’s people, but, due to the rejection of the first guests, the Jews, the Gentiles were invited to come – among them, our forefathers and ourselves. God has plenty of food for all, and His intention is to fill His house – and this is still happening. There is still room in God’s Kingdom, and God is inviting people from all around the world to come and to enjoy fellowship with Him through faith in Jesus

IV – The servants

And who are the servants that the Master sent out to invite and call people to the banquet? At a first sight, they are the twelve Apostles, who did an internship during their training with Jesus and went to the cities and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God and inviting the people to believe in Jesus. After Jesus’ resurrection, they were sent to all the world to call people to repentance and to believe the Gospel – this means: To enter the banquet hall. The disciples made new disciples, and the chain of

disciples reached our days. Pastors are the first servants of God to reach out God's gracious invitation to come to His banquet hall. But not only the pastors; everyone is committed to invite others to the banquet. It is as someone defined evangelism: One beggar tells the other beggar where there is food.

Conclusion: We are ready to call a pastor to St. Thomas. What is your vision of a pastor: Is he only a waiter to serve the members? Or is he a servant of God to invite others to the banquet with your help? Are you ready to share your food with others? ...maybe with some considered outcast?

Perhaps another question has to be raised based on this parable: How are we responding to God's gracious invitation? Are we coming gladly to the banquet? or do we have lots of personal excuses for not coming? Is our behavior like the excuses of the first guests?

"Come, for everything is now ready", was the invitation the Master sent to the guests. Some pastors (and even in some liturgies) this text is used before the distribution of the Holy Communion. This means: God did everything for us. When Jesus cried out from the cross: "It is finished!" (John 19:30), this means: "Come, for everything is now ready". We don't need to do anything to prepare the banquet. Jesus has done it all. We just have to accept the invitation and to come, enjoying God's love and fellowship that He offers in His Gospel and in the Holy Sacraments. Just believe and come. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 25 June 2017